

Showcase of Democracy

Uruguay Goes to Polls, With Economy Sagging

MONTEVIDEO.

In downtown Montevideo, on a corner shaded by several trees, is a place called "El Palacio de los Sandwiches." Its sandwiches are cut in triangles, and displayed in a glass case so the customer sees a cross-section of each sandwich. It is an appetizing sight. The bread is very thin—so thin, in fact, that it seems barely adequate to contain all the readily visible ingredients.

Upon entering one of these shops, you peer through the glass and make your choice. Then you order a quart of costly beer and sit down at a table to await the meal.

When it arrives, you notice each sandwich slopes very queerly toward the back corner. This is because there is nothing between the bread on that corner. In fact, there is nothing between the bread at all, except along the front edge of the sandwich—the edge you looked at when you peered through the glass. This makes for a generally unpleasant lunch of dry bread and expensive beer. There is no sense trying another sandwich shop, because they are all the same.

In Midst of Recession

The story would not be worth the telling if not for the fact that Uruguay's economy is very much like one of these niggardly sandwiches: It looks pretty healthy at a glance, but once past the facade there is plenty missing. Despite the fact that Montevideo, the capital, seems more prosperous than any city in South America, Uruguay is in the midst of a serious recession—and with general elections coming up this Sunday, the economic crisis is a main topic of conversation.

Uruguay, with a population of some 3,000,000, is the smallest country in South America and, in every respect, one of the most advanced. Montevideo, for instance, has none of the vast, sprawling slums that disfigure other South American capitals, and its streets are almost free of beggars.

Nor is Uruguay a debtor nation. It has received little United States foreign aid in the past 10 years. Since 1950 the World Bank has loaned Uruguay \$71,000,000, and \$15,000,000 already has been repaid. Nor a Latin American country, this is a sparkling credit record.

Social legislation is among the most advanced in the world: The eight-hour day, the 48-hour week, paid holidays (26 days a year), minimum wages, family allowances, accident and unemployment insurance, old age pensions, and social security.

Campaign's Main Issue

Yet recession clearly is the main issue in the current campaign. There hasn't been much talk, for instance, about Castro and Cuba. The Communist party is legal in Uruguay, but is far too small to affect the outcome of the elections.

Thus far, the Communists have confined themselves mainly to drawing posters showing Uncle Sam being kicked around by a big-booted foot, or congratulating the Soviet Union on its forty-fifth anniversary.

In all, the Communists are expected to garner about 3.5 per cent of the total vote. The Socialists, preferring homemade revolution to the "imported from Moscow" variety, probably will get about the same. The election boils down to a contest between the rural "conservative" Blancos, and the urban "liberal" Colorados—and whoever wins, the United States will not be seriously hurt.

Even so, no Latin American election campaign is ever quiet. On Avenida Julio 18, Montevideo's main thoroughfare, sound trucks creep up and down the street with huge speakers mounted on their roofs. Speakers are planted, too, in palm trees on the Plaza Independencia.

Most of the noise is made by the party in power, the Blancos, who have almost no chance of carrying Montevideo. Their strength is in the rural areas, thanks mainly to one man—Benito Nardone, currently one of the country's nine "presidents." The "presidents" are members of the National Council, the country's executive body, which includes six men from

the majority party and three from the other. The chairmanship rotates among the four highest majority party vote-getters.

Mr. Nardone is the first Uruguay politician to seek his support entirely outside Montevideo, which dominates Uruguay the way Providence dominates Rhode Island. He does it by means of a folksy radio show that he's conducted for more than 20 years, dispensing agricultural advice. In the last general elections in 1958, he swung between 75,000 and 100,000 votes to the Blancos, to put them back in power for the first time since 1865.

Mr. Nardone is ineligible to run for the council this time, but is still the dominant voice in the campaign.

Both Parties Are Split

The conservative Blancos are split mainly over Mr. Nardone—or, more accurately, over whether he or the party's other faction have contributed the most to the party's success since 1958. The Colorados differ on ideologies. As a result of these differences, both parties are running several "lists" of candidates.

Mr. Nardone's wing seems stronger on the Blanco side, while the leading Colorado list is headed by what might be called the "old-line liberals," headed by Jose Batlle Ordóñez. Most observers concede the liberal Colorados a big majority of the urban vote—meaning business, labor, students, and Montevideo in general.

Yet an "independent" Colorado group, headed by Zelmira Michelini, has generated more excitement. Mr. Michelini split with the Colorados over whether to admit they had made some major mistakes during their 93 years at the helm. He says they did, and his stand has won support among younger voters. His "neutralist" stance appeals to the same group; he was a Castro supporter until it became obvious that Castro was nothing but a Russian puppet.

No Solution to Crisis

No group in either party, however, has come up with anything like a solution to the financial crisis, which was building as far back as 1950. The trouble intensified after the Korean war, when foreign trade (particularly meat and wool exports) fell off alarmingly, and the value of the peso began to slip: It fell from 3.5 to the dollar in 1955, to 9.5 in 1958. When elections rolled around, the Blancos swept in with the old and honorable slogan, "It's time for a change."

But the crisis didn't end. And in this election, though all quotable comment says it's too close to predict, the experts obviously are betting on the Colorados—if Mr. Nardone doesn't deliver the entire countryside for the more powerful of the contending Blanco slates.

After taking office, the Blancos quickly devalued the peso to 11 to the dollar—and have artificially maintained it there ever since. No one believes it's still worth that much, however, since many cagey Uruguayans have cashed in their pesos for dollars. Uruguay has gotten the dollars by sending gold to the United States or elsewhere—and every bar of gold leaving the country has meant the peso is backed by that much less.

Government Is Adamant

This process reached a climax last July, when speculators finally decided a devaluation was inevitable, and large numbers cashed in their pesos for dollars. Still, in an election year, the government refused to devalue the peso still further, and thus provoked cries of further inflation.

Instead, recession set in. Pesos had been steadily removed from circulation because people cashed them in; and there were restrictions on credit, a sharp construction slowdown, widespread unemployment, and an overall economic slump.

In the midst of all this, though, wages and prices continue at their pre-recession levels, and Montevideo still is one of the most expensive cities in South America. In a sense, Uruguay has been so generous in taking care of its citizens that everyone charges what the traffic will bear—which is often plenty.

Latin American expert Louis Hanke sums it up this way: "The Welfare State is now a way of life in Uruguay, and no politician can hope to win votes by advocating austerity, hard work, and the sacrifice of benefits enjoyed for many years. The widespread custom of taking summer vacations to enjoy the superb beaches that stretch from Montevideo beyond Punta del Este will not be easily broken."

Next week's elections will not solve any problems, but they will saddle somebody with a lot of responsibility.

—HUNTER S. THOMPSON



Benito Nardone

Study Offers Debatable Points On Teen-Age 'Wetbacks' in New York

A new set of statistics popped into the New York state drinking-age controversy last week. It's now up to both sides in the argument to debate what those figures prove.

A New York legislative committee is studying whether the state's minimum drinking age should be raised from 18 to 21. So it commissioned the Louis M. Waks Research Center of the Staten Island Mental Health Society to survey the drinking habits of more than 1,000 teen-agers from 14 to 18 years old in six New York communities. A summary of the survey turned up some surprises.

Fifty-nine per cent of the under-age children indicated they drink and 45 per

cent had been introduced to drinking at home.

While the teen-age drinkers get into scrapes with the law more frequently than the non-drinkers, the survey found, they do so more often when they are sober than when they have been drinking.

Drinking in the Midwest

The study group also compared the incidence of drinking among the New York children with the habits of children in Kansas and Wisconsin, where the legal drinking age is 21.

They discovered that New York's lower minimum age does not lead teen-agers there to drink any more often, any earlier, or in any larger numbers than in the other states. But New York's underage children do drink in larger amounts than their counterparts in the two Midwestern states.

All five states that border New York complain that hordes of teen-agers from 18 to 20 cross their state lines into New York, where they can drink legally. In the five states, the minimum age for drinking is 21.

'Wetbacks' and Accidents

Some of these youthful "wetbacks" become involved in accidents while driving back home. The accidents have brought demands from officials of the neighboring states that New York raise its legal drinking age to 21. Temperance, religious, and educational organizations within New York have joined the fight.

Defenders of New York's present age limit—including New York liquor interests, anthropologist Margaret Mead, some psychiatrists, and mayors of New York border towns—accuse the law's critics of exaggerating the problem.

They believe that the new survey bolsters their argument that raising the legal drinking age in New York might stop the flow of "wetbacks" but wouldn't reduce the number of youths who drink illegally in any other state. Nor would it cut down on teen-age drunk driving and accidents, they say.

Retiring Barnard President Urges An Active Mind

Is a woman's college education wasted after graduation and marriage?

It often is but it doesn't have to be. That answer came last week from Mrs. Millicent C. McIntosh in her final report as president of Barnard College in New York City. Mrs. McIntosh, 78, retired after 15 years as head of the woman's school, an affiliate of Columbia University.

A liberal education, she said, should give a woman "a clear sense of values." Ideally, she maintains this sense of values through continued reading and reflection after graduation. She exercises it at home in the rearing of children and at work in making responsible decisions.

But too often, said Mrs. McIntosh, women graduates "allow their fine training to lapse."

They "abandon their intellectual talents either because they take jobs that are not worthy of them (often to support